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On the Air

ISU9 TRIPLLED ITS NUMBER OF SHOWS WITHIN A FEW YEARS. WHAT'S NEXT FOR IOWA STATE'S STUDENT-RUN STATION? NEW PROGRAMMING, NEW IDEAS — AND EVEN A MOVIE.

by Justin Kendall

ISU students probably don't spend much of their day contemplating how ISU9 has changed within the past couple years. You can't really blame them; if you're just flipping channels and happen to hit channel 9, you're probably not thinking about how there are now three times as many programs on as there were a couple of years ago. You're probably not thinking about how a relatively small

group of dedicated students has been working like mad to try and revamp a station that's changed names, studio locations, and channel numbers. You might watch programs such as "1800 Seconds" or "Triple Threat Sports Show," and it may not register how ISU producers have struggled to bring more diversity to a station they're not always sure students are watching. Chances are, if you're watching, you're probably just thinking about whether or not you like what you see.

One thing is for sure, there's a lot more to see. Right now, ISU9 is pumping out more original shows than ever before. Part of this is because there was a huge programming gap after ISU9, then STV-9, was forced to dump "SCOLA," a live-feed transmission of international news programs. At that time, the station only had four original shows: "Wake Up ISU," "Cyclone Fitness," "Video Plus," and "Triple Threat," a sports call-in program. Of those four, only "Triple Threat" is still on the air in its original format.

Some international students voiced their displeasure with losing what was an important source of news, not to mention a connection with their home countries. The only problem was, for a station that badly needed to carve out its niche, "SCOLA" took up a lot of air time. At any rate, when "SCOLA" became history, the ISU9 management had to get to work. They changed the station's name and worked on changing its image, too.

"It really forced us to fill the rest of the programming," says Mike Irwin, senior in journalism and former general manager of ISU9. It turned out that this was a good thing. "We just started doing shows, and it was incredible. For a while it seemed like everyone I knew had a TV show."

The arrival of temporary journalism instructor Dan Mundt also jump-started the fledgling channel. "Wake Up ISU," the station's news program, was on its last legs when Mundt made an arrangement with associate journalism professor Steve Coon about merging two electronic media classes to work on a new show. "Wake Up ISU" turned into "InCYde Out," which debuted in January 1999. It was fresher than "Wake Up ISU," and people affiliated with ISU9 have credited it with getting more students involved with the station. If the program seemed more spontaneous, that's because it was. It was ISU's first live, original show.

"InCYde Out" made a big difference," says ISU9 General Manager Jen Spencer. "It was so exciting. It was so much fun just to come in, and it was a live show. We'd plug it in and we'd be on the air during a 30-minute show and come what may was on the air. It's nerve-racking, but it was exciting and I loved the tension and I loved the pace."

"InCYde Out" had changed everything. There was now enthusiasm for ISU9. There were also a lot more shows. "I think a lot of people caught the bug through that," says Spencer, senior in journalism. "That next semester, a lot of new productions popped up."



Programs such as the sketch-comedy show "1800 Seconds," the weekend-entertainment show "FAC" or "Friday After Class," and "Triple Threat Sports Show" have become the bedrock of ISU9's programming. "InCYde Out" is no longer on the air in its original format; several other similar shows are now on the air. "1800 Seconds," launched in fall 1999, has gathered a cult following on the ISU campus. "I think that '1800 Seconds' has easily been the best show that channel 9 or channel 31 [one of ISU9's previous channel numbers] has ever done," Mundt says. "I think that there are a tremendous variety of sketches on that show and the amount of labor that students put into '1800 Seconds' is unbelievable."

"Triple Threat" is a show that started out kind of rough, and it's improved immeasurably through the years," Mundt adds. "It's probably the only show that we have that people actually tune into at a specific time to watch live."

This semester, two new episodes of the "Star Trek" spoof "Space Rocket" are on deck. Taking a cue from the apparent success of "1800 Seconds," channel 9 will premiere the comedy show "Oxymorons" this semester. Even though the station's original programming has grown, don't expect all original shows all the time. ISU9 still airs the syndicated "Burly Bear" variety show.

The station's managers are also actively trying to promote ISU9 as a leader when it comes to covering campus affairs. Channel 9 aired the ISU presidential-search forums in mid-January, giving students who skipped out on the packed forums a chance to critique the candidates. Last year the station aired a debate between candidates running for student body president. Plus, ISU9 showed ISU Theatre's performance of William Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" last semester and the New

ISU World Theatre Workshop's presentation of "Kwanzaa Y2K (First Fruits)." Channel 9 is also looking to cover more lectures by guest speakers at the Memorial Union, says Dustin McDonough, ISU9 assistant general manager.

The biggest milestone for ISU9 will be this semester's premiere of its feature-length, black-and-white movie, "Escape Velocity." The film is set during the World War II era and is "sort of an 'Indiana Jones-ish' adventure," says Mundt, who wrote the film and directed it with Andy Langager, graduate student in journalism and mass communication.

"Escape Velocity" isn't a war movie, although the main character is a Woman Air Force Service Pilot (WASP), Mundt says. The film is scheduled to air on ISU9 no later than the first week in March, so that the station will be able to enter it in the Iowa Motion Picture Association Awards.

ISU9 moved its studio from the Communications Building to Exhibit Hall in November 1999, a move that most staffers say was good for the station. Four partners, the Instructional Technology Center, ISU Extension, WOI Radio, and the Greenlee School of Journalism share the new studio. ISU9 fits into the partnership under the Greenlee School even though channel 9 is a separate entity.

"There's been concern that ISU9 should cut down on the number of hours it uses the studio and that ISU9 isn't technically an official partner and should pay to use the studio," Spencer says. "The Greenlee School has been amazingly supportive in really sticking up for channel 9 and saying that it's a learning experience for students in journalism and for students all over the university," she says.

"There's also been concerns that ISU9 isn't officially a partner, even though the Greenlee School wants us to go in under them, that maybe they shouldn't be using the studio or

maybe we should be paying for it at \$100 an hour. There's just no way we can get that kind of money because we're funded primarily by the Government of the Student Body."

However, ISU9 will survive with or without the use of Studio B in Exhibit Hall. "Channel 9 isn't Studio B in the Communications Building," Spencer says. "A lot of our shows are mostly field produced so people just take out a camera and sit in Room 1 for hours on end and edit and we have the little, tiny baby studio in Room 2 by the vending machines [in Hamilton Hall] where some work could be done. We could do it without Studio B, but we don't want to because it's a wonderful facility."

One goal for ISU9 is the addition of a news program. Spencer says it will be difficult to find people who are willing to make that sort of time commitment. "It's a lot of work to put together a news program, and I think students aren't as interested in doing news because they're not getting paid for it," she says.

The main fight is still for respectability. The station and its programs still have faults, and unfortunately those are sometimes more obvious to viewers than the improvements. "Still there's the general idea that people don't watch channel 9 because it's not good TV,"

McDonough says. "We're not a professional station with people who work full-time, so you can't expect it to look like the stations down in Des Moines, but we have a really good group of people who are dedicated workers and put out what I think is some pretty good programming."

It's good that ISU9's management is made up of true believers who won't be discouraged by tiny setbacks. They've got their eye on the big picture.

Justin Kendall is a senior editor for Ethos.

So You Want to be a Star

Ok, so you've got a television-ready personality, but Hollywood isn't beating down your door. Don't worry, while you're waiting for your big break, ISU9 can help make your small-screen dreams a reality. You don't have to be interested in broadcast as a career or even be a journalism major. Getting the chance to pitch your show to the ISU9 brass isn't difficult. In fact, says Mike Irwin, former general manager of ISU9, "It's beyond easy. All you have to do is come up with a show idea, write it down on paper, and come to one of the meetings." All the details about your show, including length, how often it'll be produced, and whether it needs to be shot in the studio or in the field should be included in your proposal, says Irwin, senior in journalism.

The next step is setting up a meeting with the ISU9 management team. You'll pitch, they'll tell you what it will take to get your show on the air, and you may win approval. If you're given the green light, you'll be set up with a crew. "Once you have approval to follow through with your show idea, then you can use channel 9 equipment to start producing and start learning," says Jen Spencer, ISU9 general manager.

Just because the process for winning your show might not be that rigorous, doesn't mean ISU9 management is going to settle for tapes of you and your best friend sitting on the couch. And familiarizing yourself with ISU9's equipment is highly recommended. It won't be the same as shooting your family picnic with a camcorder. "It's not like you can just walk into channel 9 and put together a show, because it takes the technical know-how, which is a big barrier," Spencer says. "We want people to be making an effort to produce a quality show."

If you can learn the technology and can piece together a pilot, management will view it and then you'll be able to schedule airtime through the programming team.

And don't worry if this sounds ideal but you don't know what you want to do yet. "You can come in anytime throughout the semester and how soon it gets on the air is really up to you," says Dustin McDonough, ISU9 assistant general manager.

To get involved or for more information, e-mail Jen Spencer at spencerj@iastate.edu.

—Justin Kendall